

Talking Cities The Micropolitics of Urban Space

an exhibition at ENTRY2006 - PERSPECTIVES AND VISIONS IN DESIGN
26 August to 3 December 2006, Zeche Zollverein, Essen, Germany

TALKING CITIES EXHIBITION, curated by Francesca Ferguson and urban drift productions Ltd., features innovative international design, architecture and spatial interventions in a trans-disciplinary exhibition platform. The 35 protagonists create a dense collage of statements, designs and installations: a collective dialogue on reconfiguring and reactivating the marginal, residual and public spaces of our contemporary cities.

Talking Cities is conceived as a trans-disciplinary exhibition for the spectacular coal washing plant at Zeche Zollverein, a world heritage site within Germany's industrial heartland. As part of the international architecture and design forum ENTRY2006, exhibition draws inspiration from the transformational nature of the site itself, and from the contemporary urbanized landscape that surrounds it. Zollverein's evolution into to a centre for international design and culture also creates a highly relevant setting for the presentation of architectural and urban projects that stretch our understanding of the term "architecture", towards an architecture of adaptability; one which accepts and delights in such a state of transition. The Ruhr Area has been the subject of numerous studies and propositions – not least by MVRDV and OMA – and the agglomeration of towns and cities interspersed with postindustrial landscapes, monuments, and residual brown-field sites are symptomatic of contemporary urban conditions within Europe and beyond.

With 35 exhibition protagonists from 16 countries, the 17m floor of the coal washing plant will become a dense collage of statements and installations. The exhibition design by Berlin architect Thilo Fuchs will make reference both to the elegant pragmatism of Zollverein's industrial architecture, and to the makeshift simplicity of the informal city – one which – like Archigram's propositions - literally plugs itself into the existing space for 100 days and allows the individual contributions to adapt and alter its structural grid. The exhibition design itself foregrounds this informal, low-cost stance in design with a flexible structure: A wooden grid system, literally wrapped around the existing steel columns (whose heritage preservation disallows the smallest nail or incision) and mimicking the rust-red infrastructure of the Zollverein site. The grid system allows for small-scale adaptations and at the same time upholds the practice of re-use, of bricolage, and of singular design statements composed of makeshift elements. Large-scale photographs of numerous urban contexts will bring a sense of the city into the exhibition space.

Talking Cities will thus present architectural and urban design strategies together with artistic positions, which propagate a redefinition of the potentials and capacities of architectural practice to that of a vital social and communicative tool. This collective dialogue on contemporary cityscapes is made visible via quotes and statements as graphic strips – designed by groenland.berlin – that focus the motivation and innovative practices of our participants. The density of the exhibition is intended to create a kind of conceptual bazaar for spatial practice and architecture; the juxtapositions that result are inspired by provocateurs in architecture such as Cedric Price. Focusing upon the need for political and social engagement in contemporary practice, Talking Cities makes deliberate reference to the collective spirit of 1970's activism in architecture and urban design. There is a shared sense of purpose amongst the protagonists to reconfigure, map, resample, and indeed re-activate the marginal, undervalued, and public spaces of cities. The exhibition intends to convey new perspectives on the fragmented, dispersed urban conditions and typologies within contemporary cities and the conurbations. The site intends to become a focus for multiplicity in architectural and design practice, and a form of improvisation. Overall the protagonists focus upon affordable and small-scale solutions to contemporary – and often politically-charged - urban issues and spaces – hence the subtitle to the exhibition: 'The Micropolitics of urban space'. www.thilofuchs.de // www.groenlandberlin.de

Talking Cities with:

Atelier Bow-Wow, Tokyo
atelier le balto, Berlin
baukasten.berlin
Andreas Bergmann, Berlin
Building Initiative, Belfast/Berlin
Nuno Cera, Berlin/Lisbon
Simon Conder Associates, London
Luc Deleu with T.O.P. Office, Antwerp
Detroit Collaborative Design Center
Stefan Eberstadt, Munich
el ultimo grito, London
laN+, Rome
Interbreeding Field, Tainan
KARO, Leipzig
Heike Klussmann, Berlin
Bernd Kniess and Leonhard Lagos, Cologne/Hamburg
Folke Köbberling, Martin Kaltwasser and
Christian Maier, Berlin

Aglaia Konrad, Brussels
Karsten Konrad, Berlin
KreisslKerber, Berlin
Land for Free, Essen
Lederer+Ragnarsdóttir+Oei Architects, Stuttgart
Tobias Lehmann and Floris Schiferli, Berlin/Rotterdam
Map Office, Hong Kong
N55, Copenhagen
Osservatorio Nomade, Rome
Petetin & Grégoire, Paris
Marjetica Potrc and Srdjan Weiss, Ljubljana/New York
Bas Princen, Rotterdam
Recto, Liège
Rural Studio, Auburn
studio.eu and Stalker, Berlin/Rome
Timorous Beasties Studio, Glasgow
Toh Shimazaki Architecture, London
Sissel Tolaas, Berlin.

Talking Cities Magazine

Communicating the complex architectural and design practices to a wide audience is one of the main goals of the project: hence the production of an affordable magazine, which urban drift published on the 18th of May by Birkhäuser – Publishers for Architecture. The magazine tackles the issues of the exhibition in a direct manner, through statements and manifestos by the protagonists themselves. The chapters in the magazine also expand the exhibition's issues with additional contributions by renowned authors and critics, to disseminate the concepts and strategies more widely than a conventional exhibition catalogue. Themes include: Fragmented Cityscapes; Re-thinking Modernism's megavisions; Re-engaging contested spaces; Balkanisation; Micro-topias; Design-It-Yourself.

With Essays by Simon Sadler (Los Angeles) on 'Guerilla Architecture'; Susanne Hauser (Graz) on 'An-Aesthetics'; Peter Lewis (London) on 'Evacuated Fields'; Valéry Didelon (Paris) on 'Architecture on the Edge'; Srdjan Weiss (New York) on 'Balkanisation'; Bjarke Ingels (Kopenhagen) on 'Pragmatic Utopias' a.o.

The Magazine has been designed by ITF Grafik Design based in Berlin, Hamburg and Stuttgart. Founded by Tim Reuscher, Claudia Kahl, Till Sperrle and Axel Pfaender in Berlin in 2003, ITF works for publishers, cultural institutions, magazines, shops, multinational companies and artists.
www.itfgrafikdesign.com

Talking Cities

The Micropolitics of Urban Space / Die Mikropolitik des urbanen Raums

Edited by Francesca Ferguson & urban drift productions Ltd.

Published by Birkhäuser – Publishers for Architecture

Basel_Boston_Berlin

www.birkhauser.ch

196 pages

English / German

280 color-, 30 b/w illustrations

24,5 x 31 cm

€ 14,90

ISBN -10: 3-7643-7727-5

ISBN -13: 9-783-7643-7727-4

Partnerships

Symposium “Entering the Evacuated Field”, 29 September 2006

Talking Cities is a project that grounds itself in collaborative partnerships in order to attain a wider communication of such contemporary spatial practice and strategies: hence the Symposium: „Entering the Evacuated Field“ is curated in cooperation with the Zollverein School of Management and Design in Essen, opening its spectacular new headquarters built by SANAA architects (Kazuyo Sejima & Ryue Nishizawa). Speakers of the symposium are Ole Bouman of ARCHIS/VOLUME, Atelier Bow-Wow (architects from Tokyo), el ultimo grito (designers from London) a.o. For detailed information: www.zollverein-school.de

Talking Cities Radio

The exhibition will feature its own radio station: Talking Cities Radio conceived in cooperation with the architecture-journalist Dirk Meyhöfer. Talking Cities is a dialogue about our cities, made audible to the listener in the form of a concentrated collage of statements by the exhibition's protagonists - this makes the radio station one of the main points of access to the topics addressed in the exhibition heterogeneous, multi-disciplinary and micropolitical. The visitors can choose from four channels with different profiles: “Ruhrpotttradio”, “Urban Music Channel”, “Culture Channel” and “Urban Info Radio”.

Talking Cities Audio Lounge

The interactive Audio Lounge provides the framework for Talking Cities Radio, designed exclusively for Talking Cities. The Lounge will be realised in cooperation with students from the “Hybrid Space” project group of Prof. Frans Vogelaar, Academy of Media Arts, Cologne. The four sculpted audio seating areas are traversed by broad bands, each carrying the audio signal of one of the four radio stations. By means of little cable spools in which loudspeakers are integrated, visitors can go to any point along a band and listen to the programme of that particular radio station in German, or in English.

Francesca Ferguson & urban drift

Francesca Ferguson, born in 1967, journalist and freelance curator and initiator of urban drift, founded in 1996, an international network for contemporary architecture and urban practice. www.urbandrift.org
In 2004 she curated ‘Deutschlandscape - Epicentres at the Periphery’, for the German Pavillon at the international Architecture Biennale in Venice. www.deutschlandschaft.de From Autumn 2006 she will be the director of the Swiss architecture museum in Basel.

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